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RUEHROV/AMEMBASSY VATICAN 0647

C O N F I D E N T I A L VATICAN 000008

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DEPT FOR EUR/WE LARREA; NEA/I, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/8/2017

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SUBJECT: VATICAN: IRAQ AMBASSADOR ON IRAQ INTERNAL AFFAIRS

REF: VATICAN 00226

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher J. Sandrolini, DCM, AMEMB VATICAN,  
STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Iraqi Ambassador to the Holy See Albert Yelda met with Embassy Officers along with a visiting Embassy Baghdad Officer December 29 to discuss a range of internal Iraqi matters. Yelda commented on the Saddam Hussein trial and execution, USG engagement with Syria, former PM Allawi, USG relations with Saudi Arabia, and internal Iraqi MFA issues.

12. (C) Ambassador Yelda spoke on the following topics in his December 29 meeting:

-- Foretold the imminent hanging of Saddam Hussein (Note: Yelda was late for his meeting and blamed it on a phone call he had on this matter). Yelda defended the relatively quick execution as legitimate when balanced against a Sunni belief throughout Middle East that Saddam will come back to power through some deal.

-- Opined that there was no further need to draw out Supreme Iraqi Criminal Tribunal trials for national reconciliation purposes. There is a cycle of revenge in the Arab world that will not stop with Saddam's execution; it will continue indefinitely.

-- Christian Enclave - Administrative region in Kurdistan is a bad idea. There is no infrastructure and Kurds cannot be trusted to protect Christians. (Vatican 00226)

-- USG needs to engage with Syria now. Don't ignore them as they hold power to help make peace in Middle East.

-- USG needs to push Iraqi Government to find place for former PM Allawi. He is a moderating influence that can span the divide between all factions in Iraq.

-- "The Saudis are not your friends." USG continues to be played the fool by Saudi Arabia as they pour money and support behind Baathists in Iraq and to fund Wahhabi Mosques throughout Europe and elsewhere.

-- The Head of Administration and Finance within Iraq's MFA is a Baathist who continues to create havoc inside the MFA and within Iraq's embassies worldwide. Minister Zebari is powerless to remove. USG must help Zebari to remove.

13. (C) Comment: While we cannot vouch for Yelda's credibility on specific issues, he is never without an opinion on any matter dealing with Iraq. His information sources remain unclear - interestingly, he clearly knew that a decision had been made to hang Saddam Hussein when we met with him on December 29.

